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ABSTRACT

Instructional methods and teaching resources are discussed in this document for the kindergarten teacher of bilingual beginning readers. The instructional program presented suggests, for instance, enlisting the aid of children's librarians to identify books of universal appeal; parental involvement is sought in selecting books for individual children. Use of audiotapes of stories in both English and the first language of the child is suggested, and these tapes should be available to children to listen to when they are interested. (One means of obtaining audiotapes in the native languages of children is to have community members record stories in their native tongues.) Pictorial stimuli geared to beginning readers' individual differences are reported as a successful teaching technique, as is the use of materials depicting common emotional responses, such as love and fear. Other instructional techniques which have been found to be successful in the bilingual kindergarten are reviewed. For bilingual beginning readers the instructional method of choice is individualized instruction. Finally, coercion in such a program is forbidden. (Author/DB)

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Bilingualism and Beginning Reading

Susan Partridge

More and more schools have been faced with the often-controversial problem of bilingualism. Though educational literature offers various definitions of bilingualism, this paper is concerned with the kindergarten classroom composed of children whose knowledge of English ranges from a little to virtually none, and for whom, therefore, English, basically the instructional language in the classroom, is a second language. Assigned to the same classroom are children whose native tongue is English. Teaching all of these little children to read presents a challenge if good self-images, an understanding of, and a respect for, different cultures, as well as our national unity are to prevail. A further challenge exists if our efforts are to go beyond teaching the children to read in helping them to become people who read throughout their lives, receive both pleasure and profit from it, and who thoroughly enjoy doing so. This is deemed important because there are statistics in educational literature to indicate that though children for whom English has been a second language have been taught to read, reading, for them, has not become a life-long habit. This evidence is presented in educational material in the form of percentages of drop-outs, low percentages of their enrollment in higher institutions of learning, and so on.

Undoubtedly, the challenge exists. How can it be met? Starting the job in the kindergarten has been reported as a

success story. The rationale behind this is that, in general, children who have been read to, and who, therefore, have considerable knowledge of words and their uses, generally learn to read more readily than their counterparts who have not had this experience. Therefore, a program planned to expose children to books in a way their more-fortunate counterparts have been exposed at home seems a good beginning toward making them life-long readers.

Enlisting the aid of children's librarians who are knowledgeable about books in selecting books that will meet the needs and interests of the non-English speaking children as well as those for whom English is the native tongue is suggested. Picture books, cumulative tales, books in English about the child's native culture as well as books in the child's native language, and books in which the text is printed in both languages are offered as some suggestions.

It will be found that a number of books, regardless of the ethnic culture portrayed, are books of universal appeal. Consider for a moment the story of the little Navaho girl who stealthily unravels her grandmother's weaving because her grandmother has told her that when she finishes the rug she is making, she will die. What child who has known the love of a grandmother can not relate to this story?

A collection of books carefully selected with individual children in mind should result in some parental involvement. Parents of the non-English speaking children can observe that

their children are being offered stories to which they can relate, and, at the same time are learning the language of a country which, in all probability, will be home to them and to their offspring. The parents of the English-speaking children can note that as their children are learning to read, they are also learning to know and to respect other cultures as they share a warm, friendly environment, rich in books, but posing no threat to our national unity.

Tapes of stories in both English and the language of the non-English speaking children might be placed at listening stations for use by all of the children. As the children visit these stations voluntarily, both language and social gains should become observable as should gains in self-direction which is deemed important for those who would become life-long readers.

Having, in the kindergarten, an abundance of pictures and words which have intense meaning for the individual children has been reported as being successful in teaching children to read. This suggests individualized instruction and the less-formal atmosphere which permits the teacher to spend a few minutes with each child while the other children are busy at the listening stations, engaged in art activities or games, enjoying picture books, or even reading, if they are able. No child is coerced; his/her mental, physical, emotional, and social capabilities are taken into account.

What words have meaning for children? Different words for different children, of course, but a child's name is special, and

the various names are heard throughout the day. This provides an opportunity to associate the aural with the written form. The children are encouraged to read their classmates' names so that they can distribute materials, find their places in the discussion and game circles, and so on.

What about other words? Most children like to eat, so it is not difficult to elicit from them words such as hamburgers, French fries, tortillas, tacos, and many others.

Many, if not all, children know what it means to love and to be loved. They know what it means to fear, and they have dislikes, even hates. Words about feelings, then, should be forthcoming. If the teacher writes the children's words in duplicate, the duplicate word card can be taken home. Hopefully, this will result in increased parental involvement.

The children are encouraged to read each other's words not only for the language experiences but also for peer interaction and the benefits that come from it.

It is conceivable that a teacher can find a way of providing first words that are asked for even if he/she isn't bilingual. The story of little Carlos comes to mind. Carlos lived in a rural area within walking distance of the school. One day as he arrived at school, he was crying uncontrollably. His classmates, already fond of him though he had been with them a short time, rushed to find out what the trouble was. Carlos screamed, "Le serpent! Le serpent!" Apparently, he had seen a snake on his way

to school and was very much frightened by it. Should Carlos ever request his word for snake, this presents no problem. As a matter of fact, it presents an opportunity which should not be passed by, for aside from its immediate value to Carlos' self-image, it presents an opportunity to show that there are likenesses among certain languages and that words can be, and are, borrowed from one language to another.

There are other resources (some of which may even be in the community) from which a teacher can draw. For example, there are probably some parents who are both willing and able to tape some stories in a child's native language. Teacher aides, available in some schools, might also be a help in this regard as well as in reading stories to children, conducting games, and so on, thus enabling the teacher to meet the needs of individual children. Every possible resource that might be of help to a child in overcoming anything interfering with his learning should be tapped.

Interested teachers might find further help in current educational literature in the form of descriptions of programs for the non-English speaking children being carried out in various geographical locations; accounts of how a teacher can do the job of teaching the non-English speaking children even if he/she isn't bilingual; lists of sources of free help for those setting up programs for children for whom English is a second language; and answers to various other questions one might have.

Names, fears, likes and dislikes are simply suggestions for first words. Of course, they must not be limited to these categories. Sylvia Ashton-Warner* has had Maori children ask for words such as bomb, jet, kiss, touch, butcher knife, fight, gaol, skellington and various others that have had intense meaning for the children. She claims that children given these words which are part of their dynamic life learn to read more readily than they do when they are confronted with a pre-determined vocabulary. She feels that the children's words carry vivid and powerful pictures in their minds that we couldn't possibly equal for them. "We can do no more than supply the captions," she has said.

From these words that have intense meaning for the children, the building of a sentence can be accomplished. Left-to-right progression is thus established. Some examples follow:

Pablo likes tortillas.
John R. likes hot dogs.
Mary J. likes ice cream.
Maria likes tacos.

The sentence might read, "Pablo likes tortillas" or "I like tortillas," with Pablo's name signed below it. In either case, if any child reads Pablo's sentence which his teacher has printed for him, that child can seek Pablo out to obtain any help he may need in order to understand the sentence. The child is learning self-reliance and, at the same time, freeing the teacher to help where help is needed the most.

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*Teacher (grade 1) and writer from New Zealand

The individual sentences about favorite foods might be compiled as a class book and made available to all of the children. Later there might be a separate book for each child telling all about his/her favorite foods. The same procedure might be followed as they tell about their fears, their love, and so on: "John fears Dracula" or "I fear Dracula," with John's name printed below it; "Mary loves Mommy" or "I love Mommy," with Mary's name written below. Other "fear words" such as ghost, tiger, alligator as well as other words telling about their love will probably be forthcoming as the children feel more at home in the classroom and get to know each other better.

Even at this early stage, individual children who are more facile with the language might add variety to the construction of the sentences:

John fears Dracula.
Dracula frightens John.
Dracula scares John.
John is afraid of Dracula.

Again, no coercion must be used, but neither must a bright child be denied the development of which he is capable.

From the beginning, the children have been encouraged to read each other's words. Therefore, as each child brings his/her words to a large circle, many sentences can be built using the words of the different children. Mary might start a sentence with one of her words; Pablo might add one of his words, and so

on. In addition to its value as a language and social experience, this activity develops thinking which is a "must" for the intelligent reader.

It will be noted that no mention has been made of phonics as such. This is because it is believed that children should discover books and the joy that comes from them before they are introduced to phonics, structural analysis and the like. These skills, then, will take on more meaning if the children see them as enabling them to get more joy from books. It will soon be noted, however, that children are discovering things about our language. This is evidenced in remarks such as the following:

> Alligator is a long word.
> My name (Mary) begins the same as yours (Maria).
> Love is a short word.

Children throughout the world are alike in a great many respects. They love, and they want to be loved by their parents, their peers, their teachers, and others. Children have fears, and they have dislikes. They enjoy socializing, and they seem to enjoy helping each other. Children are not prejudiced, and their habits are not engrained. However, the perceptive teacher readily notes differences among children in learning-based competencies. It is little wonder, then, that some prominent educators have questioned teaching to ethnocultural learning styles as opposed to precise competencies.

It is through attention to individual needs that group work, reported favored by some for teaching certain ethnic groups, is feasible. Different rates of learning, perceptual problems, and so on, found among children are not peculiar to any particular ethnic group, and they need special attention if children are to become active participants in the group and become known to their peers whose acceptance they seek.

Time and again, little children, taught as a group in which a pre-determined vocabulary has been used as instructional material, have been "passed on" with the group, despite the fact that they have had a precarious hold, if any, on the prescribed vocabulary. These children have suffered humiliation and defeat, and, later on, some have become drop-outs. A number of these children have had normal or better intelligence but they have had a learning problem which has needed individual attention by people competent in the field of learning problems, and this they have not received.

Any good individualized program in which the teaching is to direct competencies, does not exclude group work. For example, many children like animals, and if there are several who are interested in horses, despite the fact that they are not at the same level of reading achievement or do not have the same facility with language, they might gather together to discuss horses. A child who has had actual experience with horses but little experience with books should be invited to participate in the discussion.

An adequate diagnosis, followed by individualized instruction to direct competencies, with provision for immediate feed-back, has proved over and over to be a successful strategy for teaching children to read. In no way does this deny a culture. As a matter of fact, it enhances it, as each child, regardless of his/her ethnic background, is respected for who he is and is taught according to his needs and capabilities. Each one is made to feel that he/she is an integral part of the group.

Because no coercion is used in the program proposed in this paper, it is felt that the mental, physical, social, and emotional competencies that teachers usually strive for in the kindergarten are not neglected. In fact, in this proposed warm and friendly atmosphere, drenched in books and printed material with special meaning for each child, instruction to individual needs, parental involvement, and the tapping of all resources thought to be helpful, these competencies should be strengthened, especially since no coercion is used.

First grade should present no threat to these children who have learned to discover books and the joy that comes from them, and who have become aware that the more competent one becomes in the use of books, the more joy one receives from them. As they progress through school, their attitude toward instruction in the mechanics of reading, in vocabulary, and in comprehension, interpretive and evaluative skills should be positive. A positive attitude toward reading and a continuous personal growth through reading and sharing are the marks of the life-long reader

and the informed citizen, and an understanding of, and a respect for, the various cultures are qualities possessed by the good world-citizen. Since no nation can live unto itself, these qualities are both desirable and essential.

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